

Lent: Week 2

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Date: 08 March 2020

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[0:00] Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, Father Abraham had many sons. How does the rest of it go?

Excellent. I just wanted to get that out of the way, guys. Alright, in this morning's reading from Romans, we get a gospel bomb dropped on us.

It might seem kind of strange to get this in the midst of Lent, because I think there's a temptation for us to view Lent as a time of self-improvement that prepares us to accomplish extraordinary feats for God so that we can really win His favor.

So, we fast really intensely, we deny ourselves, and it's really easy to get carried away. I did precisely that once as an earnest young seminarian.

[1:34] I got this idea in my head that sleeping in a bed encourages spiritual laziness, so I decided I was going to sleep in the floor at night.

I shared my excellent plan for self-denial with my dear wife, Elaine, and she promptly told me that I was being absolutely ridiculous.

That was the end of that. If we practice any form of self-denial during Lent, we don't do it because any of our works ever earn salvation for us.

They don't. To the contrary, this morning we see something altogether different in the example of Abraham. Our text in Romans 4 tells us that Abraham was justified by faith, not by his works.

In other words, as our text tells us, Abraham was counted as righteous in the sight of God through faith in God, through believing God. We need that example during Lent as much as any other time, especially if we're tempted to think that giving up chocolate or Facebook is somehow going to make up for our sins.

[3:00] In Romans chapter 4, Paul is citing Abraham as an example of how to be saved. So here's our question.

What can we learn about salvation from the example we're presented with in Romans chapter 4?

First point I want us to see this morning is that believing that we can be saved by our own efforts is nothing short of an insult to God.

Well, that's strong language. But it's definitely true. We've looked at the example of Abraham. Now, of course, we know. We saw a bit of this in our reading from Genesis.

Abraham was obedient to God, except for when he wasn't, of course. But Abraham left the life he knew behind in obedience to God. He was willing to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God.

That is pretty impressive from our perspective, right? Sure, he made some mistakes, but so do all the rest of us. But is doing all of that stuff what saved Abraham?

[4:20] Is that why God made a covenant with him? Is that why God forgave his sins? Not according to Paul. Paul writes, What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh?

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say?

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. If Abraham's own doings were what saved him, he would be able to boast about it.

He would have been able to boast about it. And so would we, if our doings are what save us, right? I mean, we'd be able to boast if we were good enough to merit salvation from God.

We'd be in a different class of people than those other people who haven't quite measured up. And it would be our doing that we were in that better class of people.

[5:33] But that's not the gospel, is it? Paul goes on in verse 4. Now for the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And there it's driven home. If we are foolish enough to think that anything that we have ever done, or that anything that we will ever do, will be good enough to earn salvation for us, then we are insulting God.

Why? Well, he gave his only son to die for us and to rise again for our salvation when we were desperately lost and dead in sin and could do nothing to help ourselves.

Do we dare then to say, I think I need to pay my own way? Do we honestly think that we have ever done or will ever do anything that would please God more than the perfect righteousness of his son?

And his perfect obedience unto death on our behalf? Absolutely not. Do we dare to treat what Jesus did for us as so insufficient that we have to add something to it for it to be enough?

[7:09] Absolutely not. Do we dare? To treat God as a cruel taskmaster instead of a loving father?

Absolutely not. No, we receive what Christ has done for us as a free gift through faith. It is enough.

And it is finished. Which brings me to our next point for this morning. So, we see in our text,

Abraham believed God.

It was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham was justified by faith. Well, we've already looked at what that doesn't mean.

What does it mean for Abraham and for us to be justified by faith? Paul goes on in verses 5 through 8.

[8:14] And to the one who does not work but believes in him, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. What is it to be justified?

Why does it matter? We see what it means in Paul's citation of Psalm 31. To be justified means that our lawless deeds are forgiven.

To be justified means that our sins are covered and washed away by the shed blood of Jesus Christ so that they will never see the light of day again.

[9:23] To be justified means that though our sins are many, the Lord does not count our sins against us. Does any of that sound like it is earned by good performance?

No. In fact, all of that only applies to sinners. As Paul puts it in verse 5, it is precisely the ungodly that God justifies.

It is precisely sinners whom God justifies, whose sin he covers, whose sins will not be counted against them on that day when the Lord judges the living and the dead.

How can that be? The only answer is this. The gospel is truly the best news we have ever heard.

How can we be justified? How can we be justified? Through trusting in the God who loves and saves sinners.

[10:47] That's how. By trusting in the God who gave his only son to be our substitute. By trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the full penalty for our sins on the cross so that we will never have to.

And we can know if we're justified. It's not up in the air.

It's quite simple. If your trust is in Christ Jesus and in him alone for your salvation, you are justified. Your sins are forgiven.

You have the promise of eternal life with God. God. If that's not where you are this morning, know that Christ is able to save you too.

Turn to him today. Put your trust in his death for you. I say that from the pulpit, but not from a pedestal. I am a sinner myself who has been saved by God's grace alone, even though I'm unworthy of it.

[11:59] And that brings me to my final point for this morning. Which takes the form of a question.

Who is this message of forgiveness that we've been talking about for? Who is it for? Well, we can see Paul's answer to that question in our text.

Paul says, Is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised.

[13:06] So that righteousness would be counted to them as well and to make him the father of the circumcised. Who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

So Paul is asking, Who is this blessing for? His answer comes down in this way.

Even though Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, this blessing of salvation through Christ is for every people, group, and nation.

I have to say, I'm personally glad that's the case because I would take an educated guess that my ancestors were probably worshipping trees when God called Abraham.

God justifies the ungodly. Those who trust in Christ have their sins forgiven. Their sins are covered.

[14:17] God does not count their sins against them. No matter who you are or what your experience is, this message is for you.

If you are a believer, you need to hear it. Because, man, it is so easy to forget that your sins are forgiven and covered.

Isn't it? It's why it has been said that we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day.

Literally. Lane tells me that the other day she was in the car with the girls and she heard Mia talking quietly. She asked Mia what she was saying and it turns out that Mia was reminding herself that Jesus died for her sins.

Remind yourself. Don't forget. And take heart this morning. Fellow believers, do not let this morning go by without taking the opportunity to remember that God has put away your sins forever through the blood of His Son.

[15:38] And if we have anyone here this morning who has not put their trust in Jesus, I want you to know that this message of salvation through Jesus Christ, through believing and trusting in Him, is for you too.

No matter who you are, no matter what your past or background is, no matter how badly you think you may have messed up, Jesus Christ is offered to you.

Trust in Him. And God will forgive all your sins. And you will have eternal life. Jesus died for sinners. God justifies the ungodly. Not because we have earned it, but because our gracious God delights in showing mercy to those who are unworthy.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.